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*Vogel-Ritt of Michigan, Detroit, MI*

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## USE OF STRYCHNINE TREATED GRAIN FOR INDUSTRIAL PIGEON CONTROL

Joseph Watkins  
Vogel-Ritt of Michigan  
Detroit, Michigan

Bill, I feel like the villain following the hero. We don't fondle our birds; we kill them, haul them out in wheelbarrows. We attack the problem apparently a little differently.

When Bill Jackson asked me to appear on this program I explained that our experience in bird control had been limited and that actually I feel pretty much neophyte in this bird control field. However we've killed thousands and thousands of birds with strychnine and had some problems with labor relations in plants. So we're still groping for the right way to do it, and the easy way to do it; and I hope that at least through this discussion we may all benefit from some of our experiences.

The pest bird involved in nearly 100% of our jobs has been the pigeon. We don't do killing in residential areas, nor have we done killing in downtown areas. All of our work has been confined to industrial plants and commercial buildings where strychnine, and we have used other methods that can kill the birds. In these plants we have had some problems with industrial or labor relations. These have been coped with by working with the union, with the labor relation people, and as high up as purchasing level.

First of all we think that with strychnine if we kill these birds we are not moving them to other parts of the plant or to other plants in the immediate area. In Detroit there are a lot of large industrial plants. I have permission to mention Ford Motor Company here-I've checked with them - the Rouge River area was just a haven for pigeons and we did go to the labor relations and to the industrial hygiene and places like that to clear this before we went out and killed thousands of birds.

We like to do most of our bird work, in fact we insist on it if it is to be a large job, in the winter months. This serves a lot of purposes really. Being in the pest control business it certainly fits our schedule better; we can have men there in the winter time where we might be pressed for help in the summer. We find that the plant manager and others will go along with this approach if you explain it to them. Here are a few of the advantages I think are worth mentioning.

The bait reception is so much better in the winter time because the food supply is limited and you don't have the work men out feeding the birds on their lunch hour. It's easier to train pigeons to eat in a new area. If you're in an

industrial plant, the birds are certainly not accustomed to eating where you're going to try to train them to eat. The roofs of these plants have been our best source of baiting and killing. It takes a while to get them to eat on the roof, but by pre-baiting we can usually get them up on the roofs to eat. Often we even give them a supply of fresh water, which adds to our kill and the reception of the area.

There are not as many people outside during the winter; you don't have the complaints from the bird lovers and people from the Audubon Society. It's surprising, as Bill has indicated that if you kill a few birds you will have complaints. There is no question about it.

Dead birds are not as noticeable in winter, since they are often covered by snow. By spring they'll be pretty much rotted away, and there's always dead birds around a plant of this type anyway, regardless of what is done. I often wonder what kills them, because I've been in some plants and know nothing has been done.

The fly problem is eliminated with winter baiting; occasionally, we might get a dead bird inside which could cause some sort of insect problem. We tried a job one time in the summer and will never do another one, because it certainly created bad public relations and the flies were bad. We had to spend our profit on the job clearing up the flies.

We have never actually seen a songbird or a bird that we would want to protect, roosting or feeding with a bunch of factory pigeons. But it certainly is a point that can be mentioned to management - that we are restricted to a time that we can kill birds because our conservation department requests this (they don't insist); we try to cooperate and not expose birds to strychnine during the summer months. Usually management will go along and this is just another argument. So I think that when you plan your program on killing, you should do it in the winter time.

When we start a program of this type, we look the building over closely and try to determine where the birds are resting, and where the best place is to pre-bait, because I think this is the key to the success of a mass killing program. We use whole corn and will place it in piles (we believe that it is better in piles than scattered). We've had cases where we've had to put it in boxes; I don't particularly like the use of tin plates or anything that is shiny. When we've put it in boxes, we've had to elevate it on a little slab so that the water can run under it or at least not soak it up. We use a box like a tomato flat with holes in the bottom so that water can run through it, if that's necessary. Usually you can find a spot, a raised level on the roof where the water will run away from it, and it still is exposed to the pigeon in more of a natural environment.

After we have prebaited for a week or ten days, we can usually attract them to where we want them to feed. There will be some piles that will not be touched. Those are removed, so that we don't have so many areas to bother with on the day of killing. Piles that are being taken readily are kept filled constantly, so that they are never without food. We also put out water because we feel that in a place where water is limited—sometimes on a roof—there is water but it is not clean—and it will help to attract them in.

Once we have this feeding process or training process over, we plan our killing program for a weekend. I think this is important. Bill has indicated that he has done his on a weekend, and this just makes good sense. [Certainly in an industrial plant you are going to kill thousands of pigeons, and we have killed an estimated ten-fifteen thousand pigeons on a single job with the use of strychnine. They die quite quickly, and a good share of them can be picked up on the roof.] When we do this on a weekend, on Friday prior to Saturday baiting, we will go in and clean up every bit of bait there. By limiting the number of piles it cuts down on our clean-up program. Saturday morning, we will go in an hour or so before daybreak, so that bait can be exposed to the pigeons first thing in the morning without our being there to disturb the feeding. The pigeons will come in, and on Saturday the plants are usually quieter—there are not as many people around; not as much smoke.

After we have the bait exposed, we station men on the roof to pick up the birds which will possibly spook off other birds; we go out every hour or so to clean up the dead birds. We also station men around on ground level to pick up dead birds as they fall down, so that as few people as possible are exposed to them. We stay with this all day, and in the evening we clean up as best we can. We repeat the program again Sunday morning. We find that we reduce the flock in a single weekend by possibly 95%. I'm sure we don't kill all the birds and I'm sure there's spooking effect, or repellent effect of strychnine because we don't pick up the total number of birds we predetermined were there. We will then allow the plant to remain without any feed or anything on it for a matter of several weeks or for a long time. We watch it and if the population begins to build up (sometimes not for a long time), we will start the prebaiting program and repeat the same procedure.

We have never had a complete failure, and we've had close to 100% control in some plants. It's surprising that we can clear the birds off the roof of one plant and it doesn't seem to affect them on a plant some 50 yards away. I'm sure that with Avitrol a lot of birds could be moved and in some cases it might work as a better tool. But in a plant or industrial place where they like to get rid of the birds, not just move them, strychnine gives a quick kill; it doesn't move the flock to another plant.

I see very little danger with secondary poisoning. Some people feel that there is secondary poisoning with strychnine. Plant management has often indicated, that with these dead or sick birds, their concern is that someone might pick them up, take them home and eat them. Years ago before this affluent society, people actually would take home the squabs and eat them; but I believe I am right—if a person should eat a dead or poisoned bird, unless he actually ate the grain itself that secondary poisoning is quite remote. We've had some cases in plants where the birds or isolated bird are up in the rafters and we can't get to them, then we've used Rid-A-Bird perches to good effect where we can get to it. A .22 rifle with birdshot has worked very well when you can get approval to use it; certainly you can move them off this way.

Ours is a killing program and we have found it to be successful. If I can answer any questions on how we do it in industrial plants, I'll be glad to.

DISCUSSION:

BECK: If you will both come up here then you can answer questions on this. First, just a little confusion here at the end of Joe's talk. The question he posed was about secondary hazard, and he was indicating that unless the entrails were eaten, the secondary hazard would be very low. That is correct; nearly all of the strychnine is retained within the viscera. As long as the birds are gutted, the chances of killing anyone through the consumption of a strychnine treated bird is very, very remote. One of the problems you do have with strychnine and secondary poisoning is that dogs do not eviscerate the birds when they eat them. So if you do have caged, chained, or free-running dogs in the area, there is always (I believe, Fitzwater, you'd agree with this) this secondary hazard which should be considered. Ken Hayden was speaking of the secondary hazard to Avitrol, and perhaps some of you didn't catch that difference, so I thought I'd start out with that. Do you have any questions for these men?

STECKEL: Pigeons have a tendency to rain out of the air when they're hit with strychnine and sometimes they'll have a crop full of grain. When they land their crop will tear open and some of this grain will spill out. I'd say you have that hazard to be aware of. This is one of the reasons winter baiting is good as opposed to summer, spring, and fall. Your song birds are not likely to come in and pick up that grain.

WATKINS: Yes, that's true. As I've said, I've just never seen a song bird in these big plants.

QUESTION: I'd like to ask Bill what happened to his pigeons. Where did they go?

SPITZ: I'm going to tell you. I got a call about a month later which said, "Spitz, we heard about your pigeon job on the county courthouse. You know, we've always had pigeons, but ever since you did that courthouse job, have we had pigeons!" This call came from about ten blocks away. We chased this same flock (and this is something to be considered) all over town; we have many bird control accounts because of the job. [Laughter]

COMMENT: Back to Brooklyn with you, Spitz!

DALTON: I've never advocated the use of your product, but there was a newspaper man by the name of Joe Glover who called on me to do a job in Brooklyn at a church with about 250 pigeons on it. Right across the street from the church was a park where all the old gals came every day with nothing else to do but feed the pigeons. I was supposed to solve this problem for Joe Glover on T.V. I got hold of a pest controller named Art Brody and he put some of this Avitrol on the roof. I got the fire department to put up signs in the park "Do Not Feed

the Pigeons." I instructed the local police department to enforce the rules, gave them a permit to trap pigeons, so with everything included, I checked that area last week. Instead of having 250 pigeons on the roof, there were 5. Whatever happened to the rest I don't know, but maybe this Avitrol is of some good.

SPITZ: I'd like to add to that comment that it was an amazing thing that when we got them off the county courthouse they did move off the adjoining buildings. On this thing about the shiny plates—this was not my original idea. Somebody who had done some research work, and we're talking about constant research, suggested that I use shiny plates. You can believe this or not, but I can put shiny plates out there with no Avitrol and there won't be any birds on that building. They see the shiny plates and they go. Frankly this is what we use now. Then if we have to put some bait out there, we put out the bait. You can laugh, but it works! And they won't be repelled from the adjacent buildings, so you still have a chance of getting the business from across the street.

PIERCE: Bill, what was the length of your pre-baiting period?

SPITZ: About five weeks.

STEGMAN: I'd like to hear a discussion by both of you gentlemen on what subsequently happens, let's say, a year after doing the job. Was additional maintenance required? How long did each of your individual systems hold up?

BECK: I'm sorry we won't have time for a detailed discussion on this. Your question is a very good one, but we are limited for time. I'm going to ask each man to give a quick comment about what usually happens in follow-up. If you want to discuss with them yourself, they'll be available to you at the break.

WATKINS: We found that if the plant is an isolated one and there is not a large pigeon population in the immediate area other than right on this plant, we have a pretty long period there that we don't have much of a problem. Where they're used to seeing thousands of pigeons and see only a few, they're quite happy. Now we've had other plants where one plant will have the program and the other plant could care less; birds will filter back on the plant where we've tried to eliminate them rather quickly; probably within two, three, four months we'll begin to see a build-up, and once they start, they come back pretty fast. Then the program will have to start. It depends on how you have written the contract with your customer whether it is a continuing deal or is just an eradication program for a short time. We try not to do any jobs in the summer, as I've explained, so there's going to be a six or eight month period where we are not doing bird control in these plants; at least we try not to—we do some. We have in those places supplemented with Rid-A-Bird perches incidentally, and it's worked well.

SPITZ: We have no snow in Houston so we don't have the advantage of keeping birds refrigerated while they're deteriorating. I'll say this, we maintain regular service on these buildings, and we've done this on the county courthouse because it's been such good public relations for several years now. The reason is that the birds are not killed and there is the possibility of the pressure of moving them back in from other areas. The dead bird is not of course going to lay eggs; but these birds do, and they can repopulate the area if you don't continue work to keep them out.

RUSSELL: Bill, what formulation did you use, what mix did you use, and how did you mix it?

SPITZ: It was cracked grain and we tried it 1 to 20 and also 1 to 30. You'll find higher mortality at 1 to 20. You've got to mix it well at 1 to 30 to get good results.

BECK: Bill, you're talking about dilution baiting now, aren't you? Not everybody knows what a dilution factor is. When he says we mix it 1 to 20, he means he's using approximately 1 pound of Avitrol with 19 pounds of untreated grain. Am I right Bill?

SPITZ: That's correct.

QUESTION: Is it Avitrol or Avitrol-treated bait?

SPITZ: Avitrol-treated bait.

GOLDBERG: Bill, you say you cleaned them off this courthouse in one weekend using 1 to 30?

SPITZ: No, 1 to 20 at the beginning. I would say we got over 90% control over the Labor Day weekend, just one weekend. Course, we had one hell of a good prebait program going.

HAGGERTY: What difference did you make in regards to removing nests?

SPITZ: That's a good question. The county had been in a regular clean-up program removing dead birds that had died of natural causes before we started. We suggested that the county people clean up all the dung and all the nesting material giving the birds no place to return that was familiar to them.

FAULKNER: Would you run through that dilution factor one more time. I'm still not clear if this is unclean to clean grain, or if this is 1% of the poison.

SPITZ: One pound (part) Avitrol 200, half-percent, to 19 pounds (parts) plain untreated grain (or 29 pounds in a 1:30 scheme).

FAULKNER: What kind of plain old grain?

SPITZ: Similar to the bait. In other words the same scratch feed.

SHICK: Bill, would you explain the effects of Avitrol.

SPITZ: This is how we got terrific TV coverage. I had my kids with me the first Sunday morning when we were observing the birds and my son, twelve years old at the time, said, "Look Dad, that bird is flying one wing at a time." And that's the way they fly away. When we described that to the news media they just ate that up; everybody was talking about birds flying one wing at a time. The birds are very disoriented and off they go.

BECK: I'm going to have to give away one of Bill's secrets. He soaks Avitrol into the grain with Texas booze! (laugh) Phil, I think you can rightly be proud of the representation for your Association here. We're going to have to move on to other speakers and other topics, but these two gentlemen have done an excellent job presenting their topic. And they've done something we couldn't have gotten anyone to do ten years ago—they have gotten up here and given "trade secrets" to others, and I think that's a tremendous thing. Let's give them a hand.